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## U.S. Handoff In Afghanistan Includes Radio Training

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RACHEL MARTIN, NPR HOST: In Afghanistan, the U.S. military has long conducted propaganda campaigns to try to sway public opinion against insurgents. Now, the U.S. is teaching Afghan army units how to counter Taliban propaganda, especially with local radio. But it is hard to tell if the message is getting through.

NPR's Sean Carberry recently embedded with U.S. forces south of Kabul in Logar Province, and he brings us this story.

(MUSIC PLAYING)

SEAN CARBERRY, NPR CORRESPONDENT: From the outside, it looks like any other white metal container used for housing, offices or latrines here on Forward Operating Base Shank, the main NATO base in Logar Province south of Kabul. But inside is a fully functioning, - if spartan - radio studio. The U.S. military calls it a RIAB, or radio in a box.

SAIFITULLAH: (foreign language spoken)

CARBERRY: Saifitullah is the DJ and presenter this afternoon. He says the station is called Unity Radio and it broadcasts from 6 A.M. to 10 P.M. The signal reaches the surrounding provinces, and he says the station gets calls from listeners some 30 to 40 miles away.

SAIFITULLAH: We have different shows in this radio station, including political shows and also some recreational music and also messages.

CARBERRY: The propaganda messages are usually from the Afghan National Army, or ANA.

COLONEL HAYATULLAH MAMOND (through translator): The main focus of these messages is to tell the local people who the enemy is, and that the enemy is supported by people from outside Afghanistan.

CARBERRY: That's Colonel Hayatullah Mamond with the 4th Infantry Brigade of the Afghan army. He's one of the chief message writers. He says there are also messages targeting the insurgents and calling on them to lay down their weapons and join the peace process.

MAMOND (through translator): We tell them that fighting is not the answer. When there is peace in a country, there is development and jobs and people can live in prosperity.

MAJOR TOPAL WARED: (foreign language spoken)

CARBERRY: Major Topal Wared is the information dissemination officer for the 4th Brigade. It's a fairly new position. His job is to gather information from locals in areas patrolled by the Afghan army. He also researches Taliban propaganda and prepares counter-messages.

WARED (through translator): For example, the enemy recently went to a school in Maidan Warak Province. And they told the students that the ANA are not good people because they are cooperating with the Americans. So, we have to counter this propaganda.

CARBERRY: Major Chris Lawson is the information officer with the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team. Since June, he's been helping the ANSF, or Afghan National Security Forces, with their messaging.

MAJOR CHRIS LAWSON: Initially, we were doing coalition-led messaging. Then, about a month or two in, our brigade commander said from here on out he wants all ANSF messages.

CARBERRY: He says the Afghans are increasingly self-sufficient. He says that in addition to the Radio in a Box, the Afghans can interact directly with the people and deliver messages face to face. That's important in a culture with a strong oral tradition, he adds, and where there are not a lot of TVs or radios to go around.

LAWSON: When it's time for us to leave, I think they'll be able to sustain that. But they need to start relying more on the local media.

CARBERRY: That's because the U.S. assets are disappearing amid the drawdown of forces. When he arrived in June, he had nine RIABs in Logar and neighboring Wardak province. And now they're down to four.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: (foreign language spoken)

CARBERRY: The most difficult part of the equation is determining whether messages like this one, calling on young people to join the security forces and fight the foreign-backed enemies, are getting through and making a difference.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Since I've been here, I haven't done a study of how many people in whatever village listens to these RIABs that we have.

CARBERRY: So with coalition resources dwindling, getting the message out is just one more challenge the Afghans have to face as they confront the ongoing insurgency in Logar Province. Sean Carberry, NPR News.